

security is an obligation that Congress must protect now and in the future. Millions of Americans are depending upon this program and its benefits. Social security is a lifeline for older Americans. It is time to get on with the people's business. It is time to address the crises in America.

I come from Texas. Today is its Independence Day. But it does not mean that I rejoiced or was proud of the act, the heinous act against James Byrd, Junior. I am proud of Jasper, Texas. I am proud of the conviction. I am proud of the laws of this Nation. But we need to do more to ensure that these heinous hate crimes are prevented, and that we as a Nation make a national statement against hate crimes.

I want to see the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999 passed by this Congress expeditiously. I have named it after James Byrd, Junior, and Matthew Shepherd. I would like to collaborate with members of the Committee on the Judiciary and members of this House to pass once and forever a Hate Crimes Prevention Act in this country. How can we go forward and say that this was a heinous crime, and yet we do not want to act against it? There is documentation that there are increased hate crimes in America, and we must stand against them.

Just this morning I was in a hearing on Y2K and its relation to the compliance with Y2K needs for the Defense Department. Let me thank the Subcommittee on Technology of the Committee on Science and the oversight committee for looking at this important issue.

Many Americans are listening to disparate thoughts about this. Some say, prepare like it is a natural disaster. I say, get the United States prepared. We must work together in this Congress to ensure that we are not unprepared for Y2K.

The census must be done right, and I hope my Republican friends will join us and recognize that statistical sampling is the way to go. One American should not be left out. We have work to do.

I come from the oil patch, the energy sector. Many believe that the economy is going well, the engine of this country is strong. Let me tell the Members, there are over 50,000 people who have been laid off in the oil patch. We cannot leave them behind. I am appreciative of the Secretary of Labor, who will be working with me.

I look forward to my colleagues supporting the Jobs Protection Initiative Act, to get people back to work. I call upon the administration to make a strong stand to help those who have been laid off by low energy prices, and tell those laid-off individuals that they do count. We are going to work together and make a difference.

Let me also say, Mr. Speaker, that we have a world responsibility. I want to congratulate those who have come

back from Nigeria and seen a positive count and democracy growing in Africa. I want us to pass the African Growth and Opportunity Act, to establish business bonds between small and medium minority and women-owned businesses and Africans. I want to see peace in Ethiopia and Sierra Leone.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me say one thing, as I proceed to the Committee on the Judiciary and a hearing later on this afternoon on the Independent Counsel.

My good friend mentioned the comments of President Clinton about the Independent Counsel being the foundation stone of trust between our government and its citizens. The gentleman is right, he did say that. But all of us say now that unfortunately, this past series of events with Mr. Starr and his activities have broken the bonds of trust.

□ 1115

I worked under Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor for the Watergate proceedings. That is the standard of which we can comply. I believe this country can get rid of corruption, but we do not need to have an independent counsel that spends more time abusing the Constitution than supporting it.

Mr. Speaker, I will go on record for looking forward to the independent counsel statute expiring and getting rid of a fourth estate of government and working with the Constitution and beginning to heal this Nation, making sure, of course, that we do not have corruption in government.

INTRODUCTION OF THE BROADCAST OWNERSHIP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MICA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce that I will be introducing the Broadcast Ownership for the 21st Century Act with the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. OXLEY).

Our bill will broadly deregulate the confining ownership limitations imposed by the FCC on the television broadcast industry. As we approach the dawn of a new century, it is time to reform the antiquated rules and regulations of the FCC that they cling to in an effort to replicate the communications world of the 1950s.

Mr. Speaker, today's entertainment choices are numerous and varied. There is cable. There is direct satellite broadcast. There is Internet. We are moving into high-definition television. Back in the 1950s, we had three, four, five channels; today we have over 200-plus channels, and many of them are digital.

We must allow our American corporations in the broadcast industry to compete in the international area as well. So the objective of our bill is deregulate and allow competition.

The FCC has failed to properly respond to a vastly different marketplace. This agency appears to be consumed with a regulatory model of government rather than the trimmed down, free-market approach that the American people would like and one that the rest of the world is beginning to embrace.

The modern economics of free, over-the-air television is rapidly changing. The local broadcasters and networks continue to see steady decline in viewers who are attracted to cable and satellite programming, or who are using the Internet more and more as an entertainment option.

In addition, the broadcasters and networks are faced with ever-increasing costs for programming, especially sports programming. Profitability and success hinges on their ability to create and own more and more of their own programming.

The broadcast industry has also begun their conversion to digital by beginning to deploy digital facilities. They have already begun delivering a digital signal in America's top markets. The industry will spend the better part of the next decade creating digital programming and transforming their facilities to an all-digital environment. The estimated cost of one digital television camera alone runs into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. When all is said and done, each individual broadcaster will have to spend millions and millions of dollars converting to digital.

Mr. Speaker, if we deregulate this industry, they will be able to compete and succeed. As everyone can see, the economics of the broadcast industry today are based upon increasing costs and shrinking profits. Unless that formula is changed, the era of free over-the-air television will never be the same.

What the American people have come to expect as quality network and local programming may be altered to a world of syndicated reruns and limited original programming. The heart and soul of America's favorite form of entertainment will become one based on pay services.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 attempted to provide relief for broadcast ownership. For instance, the Telecom Act asked the FCC to review all existing rules and regulations and eliminate those that were unnecessary. In addition, the act required the FCC to review the existing duopoly rules, which limit ownership to just one television station in a local market, in order to provide relief when needed. The act also specifically instructed the FCC to grandfather all television local marketing agreements, LMAs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, three years later, the FCC has failed to act and we need to move forward. Let us get the FCC to act today. This bill will provide a great nudge. The Stearns-Frost-Oxley bill will revise the duopoly rules to allow UHF-VHF ownership combinations in the same local market and to allow UHF-VHF combinations in separate local markets that may have overlapping coverage contours, such as in the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore markets. This bill will also permanently grandfather all LMAs.

But, Mr. Speaker, within this bill, it still allows the FCC to have unusual powers. If the applicant demonstrates to the satisfaction of the commission that permitting such ownership, operation, or control will not significantly harm competition or will not significantly harm the preservation of the diversity of media voices in the television market, then it will allow them to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, many nations prevent American companies from owning any percentage of their domestic broadcast industry. We must institute reciprocity and this bill starts this process now. Our bill will allow only those nations that will allow reciprocal ownership arrangements for American companies or individuals to move into American markets.

So this legislation will fundamentally change the economic dynamics of the broadcast industry to continue its vibrant tradition. To provide reciprocity. To help broadcasters to eliminate duplicative efforts. To make them more competitive and decrease regulation. That, Mr. Speaker, is the purpose of the bill.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 21 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Reverend James David Ford, D.D., offered the following prayer:

May Your blessing, O God, be with all who seek to serve in public service as elected leaders or as associates, in government service or in private endeavor. You have called each person, O gracious God, to use the talents and gifts that are theirs in ways that promote peace in our world and right attitudes

and respect in our communities and neighborhoods. May not the words of understanding and reconciliation, of esteem and awareness, of freedom and liberty be the only words that we speak with our lips, but may those good words find home in our actions and in our hearts. May Your benediction, O God, be with those in public service and with every person now and evermore. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TRAFICANT) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. TRAFICANT led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

NATIONAL TRIO DAY

(Mr. DICKEY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DICKEY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to my colleagues' attention the celebration of National TRIO Day this past Saturday, February 27. National TRIO Day was designated by concurrent resolution on February 24, 1986, by the 99th Congress. It is celebrated on the last Saturday of each February.

The TRIO program is a Federal program that works. Students volunteer their time to learn about how to better educate themselves, to become more gainfully employed. Employees of TRIO are there to help them and encourage them. This is for families that have income of under \$24,000.

We need more funds for this program so that we could fill more slots across the country. There are more people who want to get in the program than we have slots available.

One last thing, I would like to commend Lindsey Burkett of my hometown of Pine Bluff. She is in the Upward Bound program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and is the 16-year-old daughter of Nadine Burkett and the late Ray Burkett. She is a junior honor student at Dollarway High School. I want to commend her for her work and TRIO for it also.

READ ACROSS AMERICA DAY

(Mr. CUMMINGS asked and was given permission to address the House

for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Read Across America Day. The National Education Association, partnering with some of the Nation's leading literacy education and community groups, is calling for every child and every community in America to celebrate reading today.

Reading is critically important as a platform for future learning. As a father of a 4-year-old, I enjoy the positive emotional charge of our reading experience as she soaks in every word and picture. We are forming her pre-reading skills, and she will enter school prepared to read.

Unfortunately, there are thousands of children in America who do not have their parents reading to them. Responsible adults must fill this gap for the sake of all of our children.

It is important that this Congress do all that it can to support and further child development from the rural communities of the heartland to the inner city of Baltimore, my home district. Today is a perfect opportunity to help all of our children reach their full potential.

CUBAN TRIAL CONVENED AGAINST FOUR DISSIDENTS WITH NO CHARGES FILED

(Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, for 594 days, Cuban dissidents Vladimiro Roca, Marta Beatriz Roque, Felix Bonne, and Rene Gomez Manzano have been behind Fidel Castro's prison bars, with no charges filed against them, for disseminating the document entitled, "The Homeland Belongs to All of Us," that dares to speak of counterrevolutionary beliefs, such as freedom, democracy, and human rights.

Yesterday, the regime began a kangaroo court trial behind closed doors against these four brave freedom fighters who face even more jail time. The trial of these four dissidents comes only days after the regime imposed a new law that severely punishes those who promote anti-revolutionary information.

Foreign diplomats and reporters who had expressed an interest in being present at this show trial were summarily dismissed. Foreign observers are not even allowed less than two blocks from the building in which these mock trials are being held.

On the eve of this mockery of justice, dozens of Cuban independent journalists and other dissidents, who risk their lives in an attempt to inform the international community about the reality inside Cuba, were arbitrarily arrested to prevent them from reporting on the proceedings.